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ABSTRACT

To examine the relationship between two types of motivation (altruistic and non-altruistic) and perception of the volunteer experience, 43 volunteer workers at St. Elizabeth's, a mental hospital, were surveyed. These student volunteers from Washington, D.C. area universities completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of their 10-week experience. The pretest assessed personal data, the importance of 10 motivation factors for encouraging students to volunteer, and recruitment strategies used to interest them. The posttest included evaluations of the orientation and volunteer program, motivation items from the pretest, discouragement and reasons for it, and assessment of the likelihood of future volunteering. Non-altruistic motives (e.g., useful experience for the future) were stronger than altruistic motives as indicators of positive overall evaluation, more future volunteering, less discouragement, and higher likelihood of recommending the experience to others. The most frequent and influential recruitment strategies were those that involved face-to-face contact between recruiter and prospective volunteer. Findings suggested that institutions might emphasize self-interest as well as altruism in volunteer recruitment strategies. (YLB)

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Volunteer Motivation and its Relationship to Satisfaction and Future Volunteering

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Volunteer Motivation and its Relationship to Satisfaction and Future Volunteering

To examine the relationship between two types of motivation (altruistic and non-altruistic) and perception of the volunteer experience, 43 volunteer workers at a mental hospital were asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of their 10-week experience. Non-altruistic motives (e.g., useful experience for the future) were stronger than altruistic motives as indicators of positive overall evaluation, more future volunteering, less discouragement, and higher likelihood of recommending the experience to others. These findings suggest that institutions might emphasize self-interest as well as altruism in volunteer recruitment strategies.

Volunteer Motivation and its Relationship to Satisfaction and Future Volunteering

Many hospitals and institutions recognize the significance of their volunteer programs (Price & Larson, 1982), and much has been written about such projects. However, only a small portion of the literature is research-based, and so the conventional wisdom often remains untested. The increasing emphasis upon volunteerism to lessen the cost of heretofore government-sponsored activities gives importance to efforts that build a base of knowledge on the issues and problems confronted by practitioners. Determining what motivational factors are effective in attracting and keeping volunteers can be one important step toward improving the organization and success of volunteer programs. Hence this study examined how initial reasons for volunteering were related to later satisfaction and retention of mental health volunteers.

In exploring this topic, there are some contradictory points in the literature. For example, Reichlin (1982) found that recruitment strategies stressing external rewards (e.g., college credit) have become more common than strategies stressing internal rewards (e.g., duty) as a rationale for volunteering. Such work suggests that non-altruistic motives are important to volunteer behavior.

On the other hand, a Gallup poll (1981) examining volunteer motivation found that most volunteers became

involved because they wanted to do something useful and help others. This suggests that altruistic motives are more influential.

Although other studies have described similar volunteer experiences (e.g., Price & Larson, 1982), the present study focused on aspects of volunteer motivation (both altruistic and non-altruistic) and recruitment in influencing volunteer satisfaction and retention at St. Elizabeths Hospital. The volunteer program enables student volunteers from Washington, D.C. area universities to work at the hospital for three hours per week during the school year. After a two-week orientation, students are assigned to one of several departments where they participate in recreational activities with patients.

Based on pilot interviews with former volunteers, ten motives of volunteers, classified as either altruistic or non-altruistic, were used to examine the relationship between motivation and various perceptions of the volunteer experience. It was expected that both types of motives would be related to these perceptions.

Method

Subjects

College student volunteers between the ages of 18 and 23 in the St. Elizabeths Mental Hospital weekly program were chosen as subjects. Fifty-nine volunteers from five Washington, D.C. area universities agreed to participate in

the study and completed the pretest. Forty-three of the initial volunteers completed the posttest, of which 11 were male and 32 were female.

Instruments

Mimeographed questionnaires were used for pretest and posttest. The pretest contained 35 questions. Personal data (age, religion, sex, major, future plans), the importance of each of the ten motivational factors for encouraging students to volunteer, and recruitment strategies used to interest them were assessed. All questions except the personal data items used a 5-point Likert-type format.

The posttest contained 42 questions. Evaluations of the orientation and the volunteer program in general, motivation items from the pretest, and discouragement (if any) and reasons for it were included. The posttest also asked volunteers to assess the likelihood that they would return again as volunteers. All items used a Likert-type format except the question, "Did you ever get discouraged and feel like quitting?" which had a dichotomous response choice.

Procedure

The pretest was administered to the volunteers following the first orientation session. Volunteers were given the pretest upon boarding the bus to return from the hospital to their respective universities. They were asked to complete and return the questionnaire before leaving the bus.

instructions assured volunteers that their responses would be coded so that individuals would remain anonymous.

The posttest, accompanied by addressed, stamped return envelopes, was mailed at the end of the semester to each volunteer who completed the pretest. Two weeks after the posttests were mailed, a follow-up call was made to all volunteers who had not returned them. A total of sixteen posttests were not returned a month after the posttests had been sent.

Results

Pretest

Demographic information. Mean subject age was 19.7 years. The sample was 26% male and 74% female with the majority being sophomores or juniors and social science majors. Over 60% intended to go to graduate school and 86% had previously done volunteer work. No significant differences in these figures were found between the 59 original subjects and the 43 who completed the posttest. The remainder of the analyses were conducted using data from the 43 volunteers who completed both questionnaires.

Motivation. The means for the ten motives for volunteering on the pretest are presented in Table 1. The most important motive was "broadening my experience," and the least important was "sense of duty." Means on the two summary variables (average of altruistic and non-altruistic motives) are also listed.

Recruitment Strategies. The two most frequent recruitment strategies reported were class announcements by professors (49% reported hearing about the program this way) and other volunteers (47% heard about it through other volunteers). Though potentially reaching more people, posters and the school newspaper attracted the attention of only 16% and 14% of these students, respectively. (Totals add to more than 100% because respondents were asked to check as many strategies as they remembered.) Recruitment strategies reported to be most influential on students' decision to volunteer were also class announcements (37% of the respondents chose this option) and other volunteers (chosen by 30%).

Posttest

When the posttest was administered, 86% of the 43 respondents were still involved in this volunteer work every week, 5% stopped involvement after the middle of the semester, 2% stopped involvement before mid-semester, and 7% decided not to get involved right after the orientation. Table 1 also displays means for the importance of the 10 motives at the posttest.

Predicting satisfaction and future volunteering

To examine the relationship between altruistic and non-altruistic motives and the major dependent measures (overall evaluation of the experience, likelihood of volunteering next semester, willingness to recommend this volunteer work to others), correlations were computed.

Significant correlations between the average of non-altruistic motives on the posttest and all three of these measures appeared (for evaluation $r = .56$, $p < .001$, for volunteering next semester $r = .51$, $p < .001$, and for recommending $r = .28$, $p < .04$). Significant but slightly weaker correlations also occurred between posttest altruistic motives and overall evaluation ($r = .32$, $p < .03$) and volunteering next semester ($r = .44$, $p < .01$).

The only significant correlations between pretest summary motives and the major dependent measures was the relationship between altruistic motives and recommending the experience to others ($r = .27$, $p < .05$). The individual pretest motive "useful experience for the future" was significantly related to all three dependent variables (evaluation $r = .32$, $p < .02$, next $r = .34$, $p < .02$, recommending $r = .35$, $p < .02$), however.

Other correlations were computed between recruitment strategies reported on the pretest and the three dependent measures to determine whether these situational factors influenced the volunteer experience. No significant relationships were found.

Whether the volunteer ever got discouraged and felt like quitting was strongly related to all three dependent variables (evaluation $r = .39$, next $r = .39$, recommend $r = .43$). The chief reasons for getting discouraged were feeling unprepared to be helpful, discouragement with the hospital system, and feeling the experience was depressing.

Because discouragement was influential on the dependent variables, its relationship with pretest motives was explored. A significant relationship was found between pretest selfish motives and getting discouraged as reported on the posttest ($r = -.32$, $p < .02$), such that people who rated these motives higher were less likely to get discouraged. The major motive contributing to this relationship was "useful experience for the future." The mean difference on the pretest on this variable between those who later felt discouraged ($M = 2.32$) and those who never did ($M = 3.55$) was highly significant (F (1, 41) $= 25.3$, $p < .00001$). No other pretest motive significantly differentiated between these two groups, including the sum of altruistic motives.

Discussion

This study found that non-altruistic motives were stronger than altruistic motives as indicators of volunteers' positive overall evaluation of their experience and likelihood of returning as volunteers. On the pretest, one particular motive, "useful experience for the future," was the most powerful indicator, significantly related to all three dependent variables on the posttest ten weeks later. This finding differs from a Gallup study (1981) that found that volunteers were usually altruistically motivated. The students in this study might have found volunteering important less for the function it served in performing

needed services than for the opportunities it presented for learning skills and gaining experiences that could be used in the future.

Volunteers who indicated non-altruistic motivation, especially those who believed this experience was useful for the future, were also less likely to become discouraged. These volunteers may have been less discouraged because they were seeing more tangible benefits of their service (experience, recommendations) than the volunteers motivated by altruistic reasons, whose benefits may have been more diffuse and less apparent (helping, duty). These findings suggest that institutions utilizing volunteers could increase both the number and satisfaction of volunteers by shaping their recruitment strategies to emphasize such tangible benefits.

It is also important to note that the most frequent and influential recruitment strategies were those that involved face-to-face contact between recruiter and prospective volunteer. The small number of volunteers reporting that they were recruited by other strategies suggests that these methods were less effective in attracting potential volunteers. This finding is consistent with much research in social psychology suggesting that face-to-face contact is most influential in encouraging people to engage in new behaviors such as energy conservation (e.g., & Aronson, 1983).

We suggest that ultimately both situational factors such as recruitment strategies and personal factors such as type of motivation influence volunteer satisfaction and continuation in a program. Taking into account the different rewards inherent in varying kinds of volunteer activities and searching for personal needs and dispositions relevant to those rewards can lead to a better fit between volunteer and volunteer situation (cf. Gergen, Gergen, & Meter, 1972).

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Table 1

Mean Scores on Motives for Volunteering

Motive	Pretest	Posttest
Altruistic		
Helping	3.56	3.60
Desire to feel useful	3.14	2.86
Sense of duty	2.21	2.16
Ave. of altruistic motives	2.97	2.47
Non-altruistic		
Broadens experience	3.72	3.70
Learn new skills	3.46	2.95
Curiosity	3.30	2.92
Enjoy this work	3.05	3.28
Useful for graduate school	2.84	3.00
Looks good on resume	2.77	2.81
Good for socializing	2.50	2.40
Ave. of non-alt. motives	3.07	2.58

Note. Possible scores range from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (important).